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SEA

SERVICE DATE - SEPTEMBER 12, 2003

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-308 (Sub-No. 3X)

Central Michigan Railway Company – Abandonment Exemption – in Saginaw County, MI

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Central Michigan Railway Company (CMR) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of about 1.77 miles of rail line in Saginaw County, MI. The proposed abandonment extends from milepost 2.83, at the western end of CMR's railroad bridge over Interstate 75, to milepost 4.60.¹ A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

According to CMR, the line is in poor condition and traverses predominantly flat farmland. CMR states that industrial interests are located on the south side of the line.

CMR states that there are three shippers on the line, but only one shipper has used the line during the past two years. Plastatech Engineering Ltd. (Plastatech) shipped 57 railcars in 2001 and 81 railcars in 2002.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the

¹ CMR indicates that the above-described mileposts are sometimes referred to by their former designations as milepost 17.21 and milepost 15.46, totaling approximately 1.75-miles of rail line and differing from the current designations by .02-mile. CMR points out that this discrepancy is just a measurement error in the milepost labeling, a fairly common occurrence in railroad milepost designations.

environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

Traffic

Using year 2002 data as the base year,² the proposed abandonment could result in the conversion of about 81 railcars to truck traffic. Using a conversion factor of 4 trucks per railcar,³ SEA calculated that, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, about 324 loaded trucks per year or 648 total trucks (assuming an empty backhaul) could be added to area roadways. On a per day basis about 3 trucks per day could be added to the area roadways during a 240 workday year.⁴

CMR states that Plastatech already utilizes truck transportation for shipments to its plant and CMR will offer Plastatech a transload option on its railroad, with truck delivery to Plastatech's plant. The line passes over Interstate 75.

HISTORIC REVIEW

The railroad submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. The railroad served the report on the Michigan Historic Center (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has not yet completed its review of the proposed abandonment.

According to CMR, there is one bridge on the line that is over 50 years old. The bridge spans Interstate 75, and CMR states that it has no information indicating that the bridge is significant or unique. CMR states that removal of the bridge would facilitate the Michigan Department of Transportation's plans to widen Interstate 75.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that the following environmental condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

The Michigan Historic Center has not yet completed its review of the proposed abandonment. Therefore, we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **Central Michigan Railway Company shall retain its interest in**

² Because 2002 is the most recent complete year of data, the Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is using 2002 as the base year.

³ The conversion factor is an estimate used to calculate the rail to truck conversion of varied commodities.

⁴ 240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365 day year.

and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the line and all sites and structures on the line until the completion of the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended condition is imposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Rini Ghosh, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to**

Docket No. AB-308 (Sub-No. 3X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board. If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Rini Ghosh, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1539, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at ghoshr@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: **September 12, 2003**

Comment due date: October 10, 2003.

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

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